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France

Market Development Reports

French Food Consumption Trends

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Report Highlights:

The French popular newspaper "Le Figaro" published on March 14 a long article based on an analysis conducted by the consumer survey agency SECODIP on developments in French consumer behavior and demand for foodstuffs. This survey concludes that French consumer demand is for easy-to-use, easy-to-cook products, milder and sweeter flavored products, and foods that are healthy and provide enjoyment at the same time.

Includes PSD changes: No

Includes Trade Matrix: No

Unscheduled Report

Paris [FR1], FR

French consumers increasingly ask for easy-to-use/easy-to-cook food. They spent 17.6 percent of their budget on food products in 1998, down from 33.3 percent in 1960. The time spent eating per day was reduced from three hours to one hour and 15 minutes, and the time spent preparing meals decreased from over an hour to 30 minutes.

This reduced time explains the development of frozen food consumption: per capita consumption currently amounts to 30 kg, while more than 55 percent of French households have a freezer (10 percent in 1965) and 53 percent have a micro-wave oven (1 percent in 1970). Another example is the growing demand for fresh fruit juices, at the expense of fresh fruits and juice squeezers. Also, sales of ready-to-eat salads, packed in plastic bags, are booming.

The French increasingly prefer sweet flavors over strong flavors. This is especially the case for people under 35 years old, who grew accustomed to sweets (chocolate bars, cookies) and mild flavors (processed spreadable cheeses) when they were children. In parallel, younger generations tend to eat less spicy, less salted, less peppered meals than older adults.

History shows that this trend was also true in past centuries. Food was very spicy in the Middle Ages, where a lot of vinegar and cloves were used. Food became milder in the 17th century with the generalization of the use of butter. Marinades were customary until the 19th century. Food cooked in the 20th century is therefore the mildest since the Middle Ages.

The French want enjoyment and health from food. The consumption of healthy foods and drinks such as cereals, dairy products and mineral waters has increased in the past few years. Although French demand for chicken declined for a few months after the dioxin crisis and beef consumption fell temporarily after the BSE crisis, long term trends have not altered significantly.